

Message Text

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TAGS: ELAB, UK

SUBJECT: EAST-WEST LABOR CONTACTS

REF: (A) LONDON 2126; (B) STATE 41440

1. BEGIN SUMMARY - THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF ARTICLES

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AND AN EDITORIAL IN THE BRITISH PRESS ON THE DIFFERENCES

BETWEEN THE BRITISH TUC AND THE AFL-CIO ON THE ISSUE OF EAST-WEST CONTACTS (BEING POUCHED). THESE HAVE REFERRED TO THE EAST-WEST TRADE UNION CONFERENCE ON HUMANIZATION OF THE WORK ENVIRONMENT SCHEDULED FOR GENEVA FEBRUARY 28-MARCH 1, AND TO THE TUC FRATERNAL DELEGATION TO THE AFL-CIO COUNCIL MEETING IN MIAMI (REF A). (A TUC OFFICIAL HAS DENIED THERE WAS ANY DIRECT CONFRONTATION ON EAST-WEST ISSUES DURING THE VISIT.) END SUMMARY

2. A LONDON "TIMES" EDITORIAL (FEBRUARY 20) STATES: "IT WAS PREDICTABLE THAT THERE WOULD BE DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN THE BRITISH TUC AND THE AMERICAN AFL-CIO ON WHETHER TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE WITH TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE SOVIET UNION AND EASTERN EUROPE." IT CONTINUES: "THE AMERICANS ARE RIGHT TO INSIST ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN UNIONS IN EAST AND WEST. THE BRITISH ARE RIGHT TO BELIEVE THAT TALKS CAN BE USEFUL." THE "TIMES," HOWEVER, POINTS TO THE DIFFICULTY IN RECONCILING THESE VIEWS SINCE "ALMOST ALL EAST-WEST CONTACTS HAVE TO BE CONDUCTED THROUGH OFFICIAL ORGANIZATIONS SO THAT PRACTICALLY THE ONLY WAY OF MEETING A SOVIET TRADE UNION OFFICIAL IS THROUGH INTER-UNION CONTACTS. THE WEST SHOULD PRESS TO ERODE THESE FORMAL RESTRAINTS, BUT OBVIOUSLY IT SERVES THE SOVIET PURPOSE TO MAINTAIN THEM..." HOWEVER, THE "TIMES" VIEWS THE GENEVA MEETING IN A SOMEWHAT MORE BENEVOLENT LIGHT. IT STATES: 'THE ILO CONFERENCE IS IN FACT TO BE CONCERNED WITH TECHNICAL AND PRACTICAL PROBLEMS... IT SHOULD THEREFORE PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR JUST THE SORT OF FRANK AND PRACTICAL DISCUSSIONS THAT ARE USEFUL IN EAST-WEST MEETINGS.'

3. KEITH HARPER, IN THE "GUARDIAN" (FEBRUARY 20) TAKES NOTE OF THE MIAMI MEETING IN A BRIEF ARTICLE. HE WRITES: "THE COMMUNIST BOGY HAS BEEN USED ONCE AGAIN BY THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT TO EXPRESS ITS STRONG DISAPPROVAL AT A DECISION BY THE TUC AND OTHER WESTERN EUROPEAN TRADE UNION BODIES TO PARLEY WITH THE RUSSIANS AT A CONFERENCE IN GENEVA." HE THEN QUOTES FROM THE AFL-CIO RESOLUTION ON "TOTALITARIAN LABOR FRONT ORGANIZATIONS" TRANSMITTED IN REF B. IN ANOTHER ARTICLE ON FEBRUARY 24, THE "GUARD-

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IAN" WRITER REFERS TO THE GENEVA MEETING AS THE "MOST IMPORTANT MEETING FOR MANY YEARS" IN WHICH THE "MOST NOTABLE ABSENTEES WILL BE THE AMERICANS, WHO ARE STRICTLY ADHERING TO THEIR ANTI-COMMUNIST LINE." HE ADDS THAT "EVEN AMONG WESTERN TRADE UNIONS THERE IS SOME DISAGREEMENT ON HOW FAR THE MEETING SHOULD GO." HE SAYS: "THE BRITISH HOPE FOR REGULAR ANNUAL DISCUSSIONS ON OTHER MORE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS OF MUTUAL INTEREST, SUCH AS TRADING

(SIC - TRAINING) AND EDUCATION."

4. HARPER SAYS THAT LEN MURRAY, TUC GENERAL SECRETARY, WILL HAVE A MEETING WITH ALEXANDER SHELEPIN, THE LEADER OF THE SOVIET AUCCTU, BEFORE THE CONFERENCE STARTS, WHOSE OBJECT HE SAYS IS "TO TEST THE SOVIET VIEW ON FURTHER TALKS.' AFTER SUMMARIZING THE TUC'S POSITION ON THE BASICALLY TECHNICAL ISSUES OF THE CONFERENCE -- WHICH WIL INVOLVE A DEMAND BY ITS DELEGATION FOR INTERNATIONAL RULE TO CONTROL THE BANNING AND LICENSING OF DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES -- HARPER CONCLUDES: "THE PROGRAMME, HOWEVER, IS A SPRAT TO CATCH A MACKEREL. IT IS VERY MUCH A MATTER OF SEEING HOW FAR PEOPLE WANT TO TAKE THE DISCUSSIONS FURTHER. TUC LEADERS DO NOT SEE IT AS A MAJOR MOVE TOWARDS

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DETENTE, BUT AS A WAY OF TESTING THE RUSSIANS' ATTITUDE
TOWARDS ANOTHER EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION ON BIGGER ISSUES.'
(COPIES OF THE TUC DOCUMENT BEING POUCHED).

5. JOHN ELLIOTT, IN THE "FINANCIAL TIMES" (FEBRUARY 24)
DESCRIBES THE CONFERENCE AS "AN HISTORIC EVENT BECAUSE
IT BRINGS TOGETHER TRADE UNION LEADERS FROM ALMOST ALL
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EASTERN AND WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES FOR THE FIRST
TIME IN 25 YEARS. IT MARKS THE MAJOR HEALING OF THE
BREACHES IN EAST-WEST UNION RELATIONSHIPS OPENED UP
AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND MADE WORSE BY THE 1968
INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA." HE NOTES THE VIEWS OF THE
AFL-CIO AT MIAMI BUT ADDS THAT THE BRITISH AND SOVIET
TRADE UNION LEADERS WHO "PLAYED A MAJOR PART IN SETTING
UP THE CONFERENCE" CAREFULLY CHOSE THE TOPIC "AS BEING
NON-CONTROVERSIAL ENOUGH TO PREVENT ANY MAJOR SPLITS
DEVELOPING."

6. ALAN HARGREAVES, HEAD OF THE TUC INTERNATIONAL DEPART-
MENT, COMMENTING ON THE POSSIBLE FURTHER EVOLUTION OF THE
EAST-WEST MEETINGS TOLD US: "WE ARE NOT IN A HURRY. THER
WILL PROBABLY BE ANOTHER MEETING NEXT YEAR AND THE YEAR
AFTER THAT. IT WILL TAKE A LONG TIME TO GET THE RIGHT
KIND OF DISCUSSION" (ALTHOUGH HE WAS SOMEWHAT AMBIGUOUS
ABOUT WHAT HE MEANT BY THE RIGHT KIND OF DISCUSSION).
AS FOR MACHINERY TO CONTINUE THE WORK OF THE UNIONS IN-
VOLVED BETWEEN CONFERENCES, HARGREAVES SAID THAT THE TUC
WAS NOT INITIATING ANY DEMAND FOR MORE FORMAL INTERIM
MACHINERY (SUCH AS A STANDING COMMITTEE OR SECRETARIAT).
HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT THE TUC WAS "FLEXIBLE" ON THE
MATTER.

7. HARGREAVES DESCRIBED THE VISIT OF THE TUC DELEGATION
TO MIAMI AS VERY "ROUTINE." HE WAS AWARE OF THE AFL-CIO'
RESOLUTION DENOUNCING EAST-WEST CONTACTS AND THE EAST-
WEST TRADE UNION CONFERENCE IN PARTICULAR -- A RESOLUTION
HE DESCRIBED AS A "ROUTINE STATEMENT" REAFFIRMING A 20-
YEAR OLD POLICY OF THE AFL-CIO, BUT ASSERTED THAT "NOT A
WORD WAS SAID ON THE SUBJECT" AS FAR AS HE KNEW IN THE

DIRECT MEETINGS BETWEEN THE LEADERS OF THE TWO TRADE UNION CENTERS. HARGREAVES SAID THERE WAS LITTLE GENERAL DISCUSSION. THE BRITISH SPOKE, AMONG OTHER THINGS, ON THE PROBLEMS OF THE ECONOMY, INCLUDING THE SOCIAL CONTRACT, TOLD THE AMERICANS WHAT THEY WERE DOING IN SOUTH AFRICA, AND MADE SOME REFERENCE TO THE PROBLEMS OF CHILE. (JEREMY CAMPBELL, WRITING AN ARTICLE DATED WASHINGTON IN THE TABLOID, "THE EVENING STANDARD" (FEBRUARY 24) PAINTS A MORE LURID PICTURE OF THE TUC-AFL-CIO MEETING. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HE WRITES THAT "MEANY, IT IS NOW ASSERTED, IS FURIOUS AT THE TUC FOR CULTIVATING SOVIET LEADERS OF QUESTIONABLE BACKGROUND AND RECORDS... AT LAST WEEK'S CONFERENCE OF THE AFL-CIO IN FLORIDA THE AMERICANS WERE REPORTED TO HAVE EXPLODED OVER THE BRITISH TRADE UNIONS' 'DETENTE' POLICY, EXPRESSING 'DISGUST' FOR THE POLITICAL TREND IN THE TUC." CAMPBELL ALSO STATED: "AT A TIME WHEN AMERICAN LEADERS ARE TRYING TO CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION IN THE NON-COMMUNIST WORLD, A SHARP IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICT BETWEEN BRITISH AND AMERICAN WORKERS IS THE LAST THING WASHINGTON WANTS TO SEE."

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